

The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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4 January 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Frederick L. Wetters *(initials)*
National Intelligence Officer for Africa

SUBJECT: The Famine in Ethiopia - Some Comments for Your Address

1. There are a number of African countries whose peoples face severe food shortages this year. The causes for the famine or near famine conditions now developing in Africa range from natural to man-made. Recurrent drought, deforestation, soil degradation, rapid population growth, primitive farming techniques, pests, and counterproductive government policies must all be cited.

2. Ethiopia represents the far end of the spectrum, where a government through a series of counterproductive policies has created a situation in which as many as ten million of its citizens face the real prospect of death due to famine and famine-related illnesses in 1985.

3. Let us look at Ethiopian government policies as a case study in how to parlay a drought into a disaster through ill-conceived actions and ideological blinders.

- The Mengistu government continues to emphasize collectivizing agriculture, creating state farms and collectives, and keeping food prices low in order to maintain urban support. These policies reduce incentives for private farming, cut into foreign exchange earnings, and increase dependence on imported foods.
- Until quite recently, the government has shown little inclination to expedite emergency food deliveries to the hungry remote areas, particularly those in Eritrea, Tigre, and Welo Provinces where insurgencies are active.
- Until recently, the government refused to raise the priority of off-loading emergency grain ships in Ethiopian ports, with

priority going to military materiel and material for the Tenth Anniversary celebration of the Revolution in the capital.

- The government has refused all offers from insurgents and third parties of "food truces" that would allow grain to be transported to the 4 million people who risk dying from starvation in areas where insurgents are active.
- The Ethiopian government has used food as a weapon. In urban areas, for example, food rations are distributed through party cells. In government-controlled emergency feeding stations, incoming victims must be registered and certified by party authorities, a system open to obvious abuse. Most damaging, the government is using the drought and famine as an excuse to forcibly relocate tens of thousands of victims from Tigre hundreds of miles to the south, without any evident efforts to receive them in new camps. This last policy seems to many observers to be a cynical effort to remove large numbers of peoples from areas where they might support insurgents and relocate them in distant areas in forced collectives. Even if one does not accept this interpretation, relocation efforts in other areas historically have failed--Vietnam-Cambodia comes to mind--and the cost of a humane relocation is estimated by international relief officials to be at least \$5,000 per person--a diversion of resources when every effort should be bent to relieving the starving victims where they are.

4. Despite the generous response of emergency food and medicines from the West, the famine is likely to continue and spread given the failure of the Ethiopian government to address the root causes and make policy changes. Because of the largely unconditional nature of this emergency aid, and because of the adamant and ideological attitude of the Ethiopian government, there has been little change in policies which so badly exacerbated the situation.

5. The relocation program is being resisted even by the suffering victims, over 90,000 of whom have fled into neighboring Sudan rather than be relocated. We see the anomalous situation of starving peoples staying away in larger numbers from feeding stations for fear of relocation.

6. Rather than food truces we see continuing combat in the devastated provinces between government and insurgent forces, with the Mengistu government maintaining its hard-line position of terming the insurgents "bandits" and dealing with them only by military means.

7. The Soviet response to the Ethiopian famine has been illuminating. Soviet aircraft and helicopters, billed publicly as having been sent to distribute famine relief, are being primarily used in the population relocation program. Soviet food deliveries have been a bad joke--a few thousand tons of rice, which is not in the Ethiopian diet.

8. This sad situation illustrates what the President called for in his 3 January statement announcing a billion-dollar program to help with African famine--that there must be policy changes by the host government away from actions which dishearten food growers and reduce food production. Without such changes in policies, famines such as we are now seeing in Ethiopia will become a perennial, repetitive disaster.


Frederick L. Wettering

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